

# eda

## Esempi di Architettura

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### Architects Travel

Routes, connections and resonances between the Mediterranean  
and the Nordic Countries in the 20th. century

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## Architects Travel

Routes, connections and resonances  
between the Mediterranean and the  
Nordic Countries in the 20th century





# PREFACE

JOHAN MÅRTELIUS

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In the formation of the architectural profession during the Renaissance period the encounters with canonical buildings and building sites became an important part of the education. Distancing the architect's task from the construction site to become instead an educated producer of designs through drawings, the references to well-established models were an obvious component. The Roman background cultivated by most architectural treatises from Alberti onwards naturally became the focus also for journeys by architects in the countries of northern Europe, often as the final step in their professional education.

Also for the Nordic countries, when the profession became established in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, experiencing the architecture of Rome and Italy was strongly supported. One key example was Nicodemus Tessin the Younger, the leading Swedish architect in the decades around 1700. After his basic education he spent five years in the 1670s in Italy, and mostly in Rome, documenting ancient and contemporary buildings and tutored by Carlo Fontana.

In the following centuries the visits or Grand Tours in the Mediterranean region by Nordic architects gradually expanded in various directions. Greek architecture, in Sicily and Paestum as well as in Greece itself, became popular for visits, and also Pompeii.

Towards the 20<sup>th</sup> century the interests in Nordic architectural culture shifted towards the regional and vernacular. Yet the journey to the South maintained its strong position as the final stage of a successful education. Vernacular buildings, including Pompeii, became more interesting than classical temples, and the geographical focus shifted not only to Italian sites outside of Rome, but also to other Mediterranean regions, not least to Spain.

In this sense the 20<sup>th</sup> century added new dimensions to the Grand Tour, as performed by Nordic architects to the Mediterranean region. Their new focus on Nordic vernacular turned the Mediterranean examples into representing a critical dimension of geographical distance, just like the growing interest in modernity turned the classical examples into being radical counterpoints.

But even if Nordic regionalism could achieve a creative, critical dimension through renewed Mediterranean experiences, a shift towards a more direct interest in the Mediterranean world appeared around 1915. The new active interest in the classical tradition from this period, sometimes referred to as "Swedish Grace", is represented in the following articles among others by two pioneering objects in Stockholm, the City Hall and the Woodland Cemetery. Both are in complex ways synthesizing Nordic and Mediterranean experiences.

But an even more complex dimension of the 20<sup>th</sup> century may be interpreted from the journeys in opposite directions. Some inventive architects in Italy and other Mediterranean countries, especially in the post-war era, were admirably visiting the recent achievements by Nordic architects. In these cases it was not the modernity as such that attracted the attention, but the contemporary interpretations of tradition, including Mediterranean inspiration by architects like Gunnar Asplund, Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon.

Even if the journeys and visits to remote masterpieces can be considered to be essential components in architectural education, the outcomes may differ widely. Certainly examples can be found in both classicism and modernism of close connections, where direct inspiration from models visited is projected in the creative work. But the architectural tours also serve to widen the horizons in a more general way, to overcome distances by sensually experiencing highly ranked architecture in its genuine context. On the one hand the Grand Tour can be about overcoming distances, finding types, solutions, configurations that can be reused in a different context. But on the other hand, visiting and documenting architectural highlights in their genuine context is a way of understanding architecture as fundamentally regional, local, site-specific.

This volume contains a variety of essays pointing at different connections, most of them of Nordic architects being inspired by travels to the Mediterranean, but also some examples of the opposite relationship. It is largely a result of collaborations through the last years between the chairs of architectural history at Università Politecnica delle Marche in Ancona and at the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm, where a number of seminars and workshops have been hosted on this topic.